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Shakespearean Notes

NEW READINGS

PHIN



Shakespearean Notes

AND

NEW READINGS.

BY

JOHN PHIN.

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"THE DICTIONARY OF PRACTICAL APICULTURE;"

"HOW TO USE THE MICROSCOPE;"

ETC., ETC.

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TO MY FRIEND
William F. Pinckney,
IN MEMORY OF
MANY PLEASANT HOURS,
THESE NOTES ARE DEDICATED
WITH THE SINCERE REGARD OF
THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

FOR nearly two hundred years the works of Shakespeare have been the subject of earnest examination and study by some of the mightiest intellects of Europe and America. It would therefore seem that the extensive knowledge and profound learning of these men ought to have thrown such a literary search light on every line of the great dramatist's works that those who come after them would find but scanty gleanings, if, indeed, they could find any point at all worth bringing to the notice of their fellow-students. Fully impressed with this truth it is with great diffidence that the writer offers the following notes to his fellow-lovers of Shakespeare. But being also impressed with the great value of any view which may throw new light on any passage in these writings he has decided to publish these notes, some of which embody points that he feels assured must be generally accepted.

JOHN PHIN.

PATERSON, N. J.,

December 6th, 1900.

Shakespearean Notes.

“Like a full acorn’d Boare, a Iarmen on.”

First Folio, 1623.

“Like a full-acorn’d boar, a German one.”

CYMBELINE, II. 5. 16 (Modern Editions).

In the first folio edition of Shakespeare’s works, in the play of “Cymbeline,” page 380, the second line of the first column reads as follows :

“Like a full Acorn’d Boare, a Iarmen on.”

This reading maintained its place in subsequent folios, although the words, “a Iarmen on,” are utterly unintelligible.

Rowe suggested that “Iarmen” was a misprint for “German,” and Malone defends this reading on the ground that boars were not hunted in England in the time of Shakespeare—an argument which is open to two fatal objections: First, the boar of which Posthumus speaks was not a hunted boar at all, but simply a full-fed, lusty beast, which might have been in a

forest, a barnyard, or even in a pen; and, secondly, the scene is not supposed to have occurred in the time of Shakespeare, but during the first half century of the Christian era, according to Holinshed, from whom Shakespeare undoubtedly got his historical facts.

As Malone very properly observes, the word "one" was often spelled "on," so that this point creates no difficulty.

But why a "German" boar? Iachimo was an Italian; the scene of his exploit lay in Great Britain, and there seems to be no suggestion of Germany in the case.

Warburton saw the irrelevancy of "German" and substituted "a churning on" for "a Iarmen on," the object being to give the idea of an excited animal champing and churning the foam which gathered at his mouth. Carrying out the same idea, Collier's MS. corrector reads "foaming" for "Iarmen," and Collier gives several reasons for the change.

It is admitted on all hands that the difficulty arose among the printers who, being unable to make out the original MS., put letters together as best they could. What, then, was the word which puzzled the compositor who set up this line and which he moulded into "Iarmen?" To me it seems scarcely to admit of

doubt that the word was "human," and that the correct reading of "Cymbeline" II. 5, 16. is:

"Like a full acorn'd boar, a human one,"

that is to say, a man with the characteristics of a boar, just as we say a "human tiger." And this is evidently what Posthumus meant.

This becomes the more probable when we remember that in the writing of that period both the capital *I* and the lower case *h* were carried below the line, and hence might readily be taken one for the other. The reader may easily satisfy himself on the latter point by examining the facsimiles of the Shakespeare signatures. Keeping this in mind, if we write the words "human" and "Iarmen" one above the other it will be seen how readily the mistake might occur.

The reading, "a German one," has been adopted in all the modern editions that I have seen. I feel almost certain that it is wrong.

Ford: What, a hodge-pudding? a bag of flax?

Mrs. Page: A puffed man?

Page: Old, cold, withered, and of intolerable entrails?

MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR, V. 5. 159.

The above is the reading in the First Folio, and it has been adopted without question by all subsequent editors, and in the latest complete Variorum edition of Shakespeare* there is no note of any suggestion of a different reading.

Nevertheless, to me it seems very much like nonsense. Flax is not usually packed in bags but is generally put up in bundles, and, moreover, there would be nothing very offensive about a bag filled with flax, while the epithet is obviously intended to be an abusive one.

I feel sure, therefore, that the word *flax* is a misprint for *flux*, a euphemistic substitute for a much more vulgar and offensive term.

This is not the only passage in Shakespeare's works in which the word "flux" is used in this or a similar sense. It occurs in "As You Like It," III. 2, 70,

* The Cambridge Edition of Shakespeare's works, edited by W. Aldis Wright, LL.D. 9 vols. New York: Macmillan Co.

where Touchstone speaks of "the very uncleanly flux of a cat."

Falstaff's protuberant corpulency gave occasion for many such scurrilous and abusive comparisons. Thus, in "I Henry IV." II. 4, 497, he is called "a stuffed cloak-bag of guts." A "bag of flax" would be a mild and almost senseless phrase compared with this and other expressions, some of which Shakespeare puts into the mouths of the "Wives."

Roderigo: Here is her father's house; I'll call aloud.

Iago: Do with like timorous accent and dire yell
As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities.

OTHELLO, I. 1, 74.

The quotation which stands at the head of this note is the recognized reading of the standard Shakespearean text. That it is utter nonsense must be obvious to even the most cursory reader, and yet it holds its place in all modern editions.

How could a fire be "spied" by negligence? If spied at all, a certain amount of attention must have been called into action, and certainly attentive observation is the very opposite of negligence.

Warburton saw this long ago, and in his edition (1747), Vol. VIII., page 278, we find this note:

"This is not sense, take it which way you will. If *night* and *negligence* relate to *spied*, it is absurd to say *the fire was spied by negligence*. If *night* and *negligence* refer only to the time and occasion, it should then be *by night* and *through negligence*. Otherwise the particle *by* would be made to signify *time* applied to one word, and *cause* applied to the other. We should read, there-

fore, *Is SPRED*, by which all these faults are avoided. But what is of most weight, the similitude thus emended, agrees best with the fact it is applied to. Had this notice been given to Brabantio before his daughter ran away and married, it might then indeed have been well enough compared to the alarm given of a fire just *spied*, assoon (*sic*) as it was begun. But being given after the parties were bedded it was more fitly compared to a fire *spred by night and negligence*, so as not to be extinguished."

Johnson, in his edition published soon after that of Warburton, criticised this note very severely on grammatical grounds, and it is probably in consequence of this that Warburton's suggestion has never been adopted. But the question is not one of grammar at all, but one of common sense. However poorly or however ably the idea may be expressed, it still stands as a truth that cannot be disputed, that no fire was ever "spied by negligence," and the more the negligence the less the chance of a fire being "spied."

Some have paraphrased the sentence so as to make it read "*at night and through negligence*," but this does not help the matter at all.

The substitution of "spied" for "spred" in the printing office, depending as it does upon the exchange of one letter for another which closely resembles it in form, would not be difficult, as every proof-reader

knows; and while the modern spelling of the word is "spread," the older specimens of printing give both "spred" and "spread," and the former more frequently than the latter. Thus in the note quoted from Warburton the spelling is "spred," and the same is the case in the First Folio, in "Coriolanus" III. 1, 311; "Hamlet" III. 4, 151; "Hamlet" IV. 7, 176, and other passages.

It is certainly to be hoped that hereafter the reading of this passage will be

"As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spread in populous cities."

For while it is unquestionably true that no one has a right to introduce so-called "improvements" into the text of any author, an exception should be made in the case of obvious typographical errors. Even when the text is carefully read by proof-readers and by the author himself, errors of this kind are apt to creep in. In the present case we must remember that Shakespeare had been in his grave seven years when the First Folio was published, and the proof-reading was certainly very careless in many passages. In the words of Prof. Craik: "Indisputable and undisputed errors are of frequent occurrence, so gross that it is impossible they could have been passed over, at any rate in such numbers, if the proof-sheets had undergone any

systematic revision by a qualified person, however rapid. They were read in the printing office, with more or less attention, when there was time, and often, when there was any hurry or pressure, sent to press with little or no examination. Everything betokens that editor or editing of the volume, in any proper or distinctive sense there could have been none. The only editor was manifestly the head workman in the printing-office." *

The fact that the line as it stands is nonsense has been noticed by several Shakespearean students; but the great difference between the modern spellings of "spied" and "spread" has rendered it difficult to suggest the true reading, and I here revive the old suggestion of Warburton in the hope that this blur upon the accepted text may be removed.

"The English of Shakespeare," Second Edition, p. 14.

Falstaff: What trade art thou, Feeble?

Feeble: A woman's tailor, Sir.

Shallow: Shall I prick him, Sir?

Falstaff: You may; but if he had been a man's tailor he'd have pricked you.

II HENRY IV. III. 2. 164.

It is very evident that the reply of Falstaff to Shallow has a special significance which is to be found in the different meanings given to the word *prick*. As used by Shallow the word obviously means to mark or check off; but this is not the signification of *prick* in Falstaff's reply.

The interpretation given by Schmidt and others is "to dress up," "to trim." But although the word sometimes bears this signification it seems to me hardly likely that Falstaff would have uttered such a truism as that. It would have "gone without saying" that if Feeble had been a man's tailor he might have dressed a man.

If the reader will turn to the opening of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" he will find that Shakespeare throws a great deal of ridicule on his old foe, Sir Thomas Lucy, who bore as his coat of arms three *lucies*.

or pikes. These were increased to a dozen by Slender, and were called *louses** by the Welsh parson, Evans.

Now if, in connection with this fact, we bear in mind that the slang name for a man's tailor is *prick-louse*,† we can have no difficulty in understanding Falstaff's slurring remark.

To my mind there is no doubt that Shakespeare here indulged in another fling at Sir Thomas Lucy (of whom Shallow is acknowledged to be the representative) and his *luc*es or *louses*.

Such an interpretation has some force in it, while to say that "to prick" here means "to dress" has no point whatever.

Before leaving this subject it may not be amiss to call the attention of our Baconian friends to the following point :

That Shakespeare and Sir Thomas Lucy were bitter enemies is a matter of record, and that Shakespeare

* Louse is pronounced *loos* in the Scotch language, and was probably so pronounced in England in Shakespeare's time. Not only the pronunciation of many words, but their meaning in the two languages was nearly alike and frequently different from that of the present time. I have on my shelves "A Complete Commentary on Milton's Paradise Lost," published in 1744, by James Paterson, M. A., in which he claims to explain, amongst others, the words of "Old English or Scottish."

† The word will be found in Burns and in all our large dictionaries.

revenged himself by caricaturing the knight is universally acknowledged. Hence the bringing in of the "lucres," both in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and, as we believe, in "II Henry IV."

Bacon, on the other hand, was on terms of intimate friendship with the Lucys, being connected with them by marriage. Is it, then, at all probable that if Bacon was the author, or even the editor, of these plays, Sir Thomas Lucy would have been held up to ridicule in this scurrilous manner?

I think not. And if so, what then becomes of the alleged "Cryptogram" in the First Folio?

King: But now my cousin Hamlet and my son.

Hamlet (aside): A little more than kin and less than kind.

HAMLET, I. 2. 64.

Hamlet: * * * bloody, bawdy villain !

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain !

HAMLET, II. 2. 608.

O, had thy mother borne so hard a mind,

She had not brought thee forth but died unkind.

VENUS AND ADONIS, 202.

The meaning of the word *kind*, as it occurs in the first quotation which we have placed at the head of this page, has been the subject of much discussion. Dr. Furness, in his New Variorum edition of Shakespeare, occupies more than a closely-printed royal octavo page with the different interpretations which have been given by various authors.

It is now more than a third of a century since the writer felt assured that the word "kind" in this passage did not mean either *benevolent* or *of the same nature* but *child* or *son*, and that it should be pronounced so as to rhyme with the syllable *kind*, as found in *kindergarten*.

' Since that time I have read several communications to the press in which the same idea was embodied, the authors of these letters having evidently reached this conclusion independently.

. But it is nearly a century and a half since this interpretation of the passage in question was published, the author being no other than the famous lexicographer, Samuel Johnson. In the eighth volume of his edition of Shakespeare, page 141, he says: "*Kind* is the Teutonic word for *child*. Hamlet therefore answers with propriety to the titles of *cousin* and *son*, which the King had given him, that he was somewhat more than *cousin* and less than *son*."

Johnson's view of the meaning of "kind" has not been generally accepted, the chief objection apparently being that of Steevens, who, as Dr. Furness says, "properly required some proof that 'kind' was ever used by any English writer for 'child.' "

I confess that I cannot attach much importance to this objection. Shakespeare, as is well known, uses several purely German words; he also employs one word which is used nowhere else, either by himself or any other author, and there are several words which are used only once in his writings.

Now, while it is probably true that the word *kind* is used nowhere else as a synonym for *child* or *son*, it

is a fact that in one, and perhaps in two instances, it forms part of a compound word in which it carries this meaning. One of these is found in the third quotation placed at the head of this note. In the last line the word *unkind* undoubtedly signifies *childless*; at least this is the meaning attached to it by some of our ablest commentators.

The second quotation contains a word which, so far as I can ascertain, is found nowhere else. All our large dictionaries give this passage from *Hamlet* as the sole authority for the word *kindless*, the definition given being “unnatural.”

Many years ago it struck me that the true meaning of the word is *childless*—a condition which has always been a subject of reproach. Under this impression I addressed a note to the late Edwin Booth, an acknowledged authority on the interpretation of this play. His reply was as follows :

“BALTIMORE, *October 11th, 1879.*

“JOHN PHIN, ESQ.

“Dear Sir :

“Some years ago my attention was directed, doubtless by yourself, to the passage in question, but as I thought of no other interpretation of ‘kind’ than that of kinship I have refrained from using the obsolete ex-

pression (kind) lest it might perplex rather than instruct my hearers.

“Your idea that ‘kindless’ is a reproachful reference to the childless condition of ‘Claudius’ is certainly ingenious.

“The glossaries give ‘unnatural’ as its definition; but I suspect that Shakespeare intended a more comprehensive one, and that ‘Hamlet,’ by this forced use of the word, means that ‘Claudius’ is alone in his great villainy—that there is none other of his kind or genus.

“Perhaps this notion of mine is far-fetched, but, to my thinking, it is Shakespearean. At all events, ’tis more forcible, I fancy, than the mere reproachful ‘dig’ at the king’s sterility.

“Truly yours,

“EDWIN BOOTH.”

Mr. Booth’s letter undoubtedly gives the meaning of these passages as understood by the ordinary hearer, and his reason for using the pronunciation which served to emphasize that meaning is a good one. Nevertheless, I cannot avoid the impression that in these two passages Shakespeare intended to convey ideas which are more pointed or striking than those which attach to the interpretation usually given by the commentators.

In the first passage, the words of Hamlet are evi-

dently a commentary on the speech of the king. The king commences by addressing Hamlet as his cousin; then, evidently after a slight pause for thought, he adds, "and my son." To Hamlet this address seems to imply just what any hearer would infer, viz., that cousin was not quite close enough, and yet there might be some hesitation in calling him son, seeing that he was only a stepson. Hence the propriety of Hamlet's aside—a little more than mere cousin or kin and yet not quite a son, though the king had married his mother—the word *kind* being here employed instead of son for the sake of the jingle between *kin* and *kind*, the *i* in both being pronounced alike.

That the old dramatists were much given to these jingling contrasts is well known to all students of the literature of that age. Of this, Dr. Furness, in his edition of *Hamlet*, gives several illustrations taken from old writers; and that Shakespeare himself was fond of this kind of play upon words is well known to students of his works. Thus, in "Macbeth" II, 3, 146, we find

" * * * the near in blood
The nearer bloody."

In regard to the word *kindless*, as found in the second quotation, we must bear in mind that the word

occurs in a torrent of invective, Hamlet having, as he himself tells us,

“ * * * unpacked his heart with words,
And fallen a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion ! ”

The idea conveyed by each of the words used is, therefore, simple and direct. Hamlet here employs no words involving far-fetched or intricate thoughts, and certainly the drab-like and scurrilous taunt of sterility is quite in keeping with the other expressions, for we all know that such an imputation has always been considered one of the bitterest. Time out of mind old maids and old bachelors have been a mark for the scurrilous epithets uttered by drabs and scullions.

And in this very play (III. 2. 260) Hamlet himself boasts of his own virility.

Therefore, while the conclusion may not be positively certain, it seems to me that it is altogether the most likely that *child* or *son* is the true meaning of the word *kind* in all these passages.

Slender: Two Edward shovel-boards, that cost me two shilling and two pence a-piece of Yead Miller, by these gloves.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR, I. 1. 160.

Falstaff: Hear ye, Yedward.

I HENRY IV. I. 2. 149.

It is unnecessary to explain that “Yead” and “Yedward” are variations of *Ed* and *Edward*. As to the origin of these variations, different explanations have been given. “Some say that *Y* is a contraction of *my*” (Rolfe); but this we very much doubt. It seems to us rather to be a relic of the Scotch or old English, in which *y* was and is frequently prefixed to words beginning with a vowel. Thus, in “Guy Man-nering,” Vol. II, page 222 (of the edition of 1829), Dominie Sampson promises to deliver to Col. Man-nering the “sealed yepistle” of Meg Merrilies; and in “St. Ronan’s Well,” Vol. II, page 196 (same edition) *once (aince)* is spelled *yince*. In the south of Scotland the *y* is frequently so used at this day. Thus, *aits* (oats) is pronounced *yits*; *eild* (age) *yield*, etc., etc.

Consequently, the use of the *Y* in the passages we have quoted is not to be wondered at, since the writings of Shakespeare are full of Scotticisms or old English forms which have passed out of use.

Falstaff: What, is the old king dead?

Pistol: As nail in door: the things I speak are just.

II HENRY IV. V. 3, 125.

Cade: * * * Come thou and thy five men, and if I do not leave you all as dead as a door nail, I pray God I may never eat grass more.

II HENRY VI. IV. 10, 43.

The saying, "dead as a door nail," is found in *Piers Plowman*, and, indeed, the comparison is not only quite old, but very common even now.

In most of our large dictionaries, the word "door nail" is defined as "the nail on which, in ancient doors, the knocker struck." This definition is due to Steevens (1763), who, as is well known, was so noted alike for his ability and the recklessness with which he used the scintillations of his imagination as a substitute for the results of knowledge and research, that he has been called the Puck of commentators. Steevens gives the following account of the origin of the expression, "dead as a door nail": "This proverbial expression is oftener used than understood. The door nail is the nail on which, in ancient doors, the knocker strikes. It is, therefore, used as a comparison to any

one irrecoverably dead, one who has fallen (as Virgil says) *multa morte*, that is, with abundant death, such as iteration of strokes on the head would naturally produce."

This comment or gloss seems to have been accepted without hesitation by all subsequent editors, and without any hint that there might be another and a truer explanation. I am fully aware of the fact that we must not criticise these proverbial expressions too closely or carry our explanations too far. Reams of paper and quarts of ink have been wasted on Hamlet's saying, "I know a hawk from a handsaw," and yet this is not more inconsequent than hundreds of other comparisons in common use, such as: "I don't know him from a side of sole leather;" "He does not know a B from a bull's foot;" "Smiling as a basket of chips;" "Crazy as a bed-bug," (which, by the way, as I have been credibly informed, is a most deliberate and vicious little animal). The pith of these ridiculous comparisons seems to consist in the absurd contrasts which they present, sometimes aided by a sort of jingling alliteration, as in the case of the door nail.

I must confess, however, that Steevens' account of the origin of the expression "dead as a door nail," seems to me altogether too subtle and refined to be historically true. It certainly never entered into the

minds of the "mechanicals" amongst whom it probably originated and by whom chiefly it was used, as is seen even at the present day. What, then, was the most probable origin of the saying?

In the olden time all nails used in building construction were made of wrought iron, and were capable of being *clinched*, as it is called—that is, the points were turned over, bent back and forced into the wood in a direction the reverse of that in which the nail was originally driven. Moreover, the doors of those days were not like the flimsy affairs which now do duty in our houses. They had no panels which a stout tramp could knock to pieces with a kick of his foot, but were made of vertical boards, or rather thin planks, crossed on the inside with a series of bars or battens, so that the door practically consisted of two thicknesses of boards firmly nailed together, the nails being clinched, so that it was very difficult to withdraw them. These doors were so stout that they easily resisted the utmost strength of half a dozen men, and in fact nothing short of a sledge-hammer could force them, this great strength being absolutely necessary in the troublous times when they were in use.

Now when a nail had been thus driven and clinched it was rendered entirely useless until re-forged; it was, for all practical purposes, *dead*, and hence formed

a fair comparison for man or animal that was dead past recovery.

That this application of the word *dead* and the allied word *kill* is neither far-fetched nor unusual is familiar knowledge to printers and mechanics. The printer talks of "dead matter"—that is, type that for any reason cannot be used. And he also speaks of "killing" an article that is in type, by which he means setting the type aside to be distributed. So the engineer speaks of "killing" an engine when he removes some essential part so that the machine cannot be used, and such an engine is said to be "dead."

The part on which the old knocker struck was generally a portion of the frame in which it was held. It is true that in the very cheap knockers a short, broad-headed nail may sometimes have been used for this purpose; but this nail would have been easily withdrawn, and might be effectively used again, so that it was not by any means "dead" in the mechanical sense of the term, as were the nails used in constructing the door.

I am therefore led to reject Steevens' conjectural explanation and definition, and to believe that the proverb was based on the fact that a nail which had been used for holding together the planks and battens of a door was practically used up or "dead."

WHAT IS A SIXPENNY NAIL?

Falstaff: You may buy land now as cheap as stinking mackerel.

Prince: Why then it is like, if there come a hot June, and this civil buffeting hold, we shall buy maiden-heads, as they buy hob-nails, by the hundreds.

I HENRY IV. II. 4, 394.

About thirty years ago some writer with more imagination than industry, contributed to one of our literary journals a short article on nails, in which he explained that the word *penny* in the compounds sixpenny, tenpenny, etc., was a corruption of *pound*, and that the word sixpenny really meant sixpound, or "sixpun," as it was said to be vulgarly pronounced, and that a thousand sixpenny nails weighed six pounds. Five minutes spent in any hardware store would have destroyed this fine-spun theory; but it was more easy, as well as more pleasant, to write a taking article than to count and weigh out rough nails. So the article was published, and was at once taken up and quoted by the press throughout the country as being an interesting and valuable item of

information. Of course the correctness of this explanation was denied over and over again, the writer, amongst others, giving the true origin of the word *penny* in this connection. But the error kept triumphantly on its way, and the statement has now found a place in most of our large dictionaries—"The Imperial," "The Century," "The International," "The Standard," etc.

Fortunately, the facts connected with the history of the nomenclature of nails have not passed beyond the memory of living men. The old names were based upon the actual conditions existing at the time when they were first applied, and all the changes that have since taken place have been made within recent times.

Up to a point of time well within the present century, all the nails used in Great Britain in building, cabinet-making, fencing, etc., were hand-forged, and were sold by count. Three or four kinds, used for special purposes, were cast. Of these were "sparables" (sparrow-bills), a short, thick nail used by shoemakers; "lathers," used by plasterers for nailing laths; "wallers," used by gardeners for nailing the woolen or leather straps which held the branches of fruit trees to walls, etc. The large-headed brass nails used by trunk-makers were also cast; but the great bulk of the nails in common use were forged by hand

out of iron rods, known as "nail-rods," and were sold by the hundred. Of course, the larger and heavier the nail the more iron and the more labor were required in forging, but even the short, large-headed nails used by shoe makers, and known as "clout-" or "hob-nails," were sold by count, and of this we have a curious record in the passage quoted at the head of this note. In the first part of "Henry IV." II. 4, 399, Falstaff tells the Prince: "You may buy land now as cheap as stinking mackerel." To which the Prince replies: "Why then, it is like, if there come a hot June, and this civil buffeting hold, we shall buy maiden-heads as they buy hob-nails, by the hundreds"—a pretty clear proof that in Shakespeare's time nails were sold by count.

A sixpenny nail, therefore, was one that was sold for six pence per hundred; ten-penny nails sold for ten pence per hundred, and so on for other sizes.

Prior to the invention of the machine-made article, nails were quite costly. Adam Smith tells us that in the eighteenth century nails were used in Scotland for money, just as bullets were in New England at one time; and by the old carpenters, wooden pins were made to take the place of nails of even medium sizes. As they became cheaper the nailers at first gave a greater number to the hundred, hence the "long

hundred" of six score, just as bakers gave thirteen for a dozen. When the value fell still lower, the price was changed, and sixpenny nails were sold for five, four and even threepence per hundred.

When the invention of the steam engine had greatly lessened the cost of mining coal and the expense of manufacturing iron, numerous attempts were made to produce nails by machinery. None of these inventions was commercially successful until the introduction of the American cut nails. These lowered the price so much that thereafter nails were sold altogether by weight, and the original designations of "sixpenny," "twopenny," etc., became merely a rude index of size, which was as often designated by length as otherwise, as two-inch nails, five-inch nails, etc.

But there are two directions in which the size of a nail may be varied—length and thickness, and the latter, as is easily understood, is best expressed by weight for a given length. In the old days of nails sold by count, there were three grades of nails—"common," "bastard," and "fine;" afterward the thickness was regulated by weight per thousand, and there were "seven-pound," "ten-pound," etc., nails of a given length. But this was long after the use of the terms "sixpenny," "tenpenny," etc., had been established, so that it would be absurd to derive the

word *penny* from the word *pound*, which came after it, and not before.

It is to be hoped that in the "New English Dictionary," edited by Dr. Murray, the errors we have just pointed out will be corrected. Etymologists are now universally agreed that the actual history of a word is the only key to its origin, and a little enquiry amongst the older carpenters of London would soon set the question forever at rest. Enquiry might also be made in "The Black Country," where the making of nails by hand was at one time carried on quite extensively, and I believe is not yet entirely given up. There must be men now living who can remember all about the early nails, and can give the facts necessary for a correct explanation of the words in use.



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